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OUR POLICY—WHAT SHOULD IT BE?

COTTEWORTH, (near Carrollton, Miss.)
March 15, 1868

My dear sir:

When I went to Jackson, a few days since, to attend a meeting of the Democratic State Central Committee, I had very well matured views in reference to the policy we ought to pursue in the election, now shortly to come off, on the ratification or rejection of the proposed new constitution. Though the conclusion I arrived at was the result of much anxious reflection, as well as of conference and discussion with my friends in this county, yet I feared implicitly to rest upon it. We are now surrounded with difficulties unprecedented in our history, or in the history of any other people; and we are threatened with perils so disastrous and ruinous, not only to ourselves personally, but to the form of government and the social and political institutions under which we have heretofore lived, that he who seeks the pathway he ought to tread, necessarily halts and doubts and hesitates, fearing lest he may err, and that fatally. Thus circumstanced, I could not have been otherwise than greatly edified, and pleased, at listening to the very able, full and frank discussion, which took place in the committee.

Upon the main point discussed by us, the conference strengthened my previous convictions.

On this point, you expressed an opinion adverse to my own, and I deem the matter of such vital importance, that I now propose to state for your consideration, the reasons which have caused me to differ with you, and to ask you to review the ground upon which you stand.

The question is, Ought we to run candidates for the State and county offices provided for by the proposed constitution, if it is almost certain, an election for these offices will be ordered by the Convention? I think we ought, for the following, among other reasons, which might be urged.

In the first place, men are so constituted that they do not exert themselves so much to carry out a principle, as they do to advance the man who represents it. A mere principle without a material and an outward representation of it, is altogether too ethereal and spiritual to excite the passionate and earnest action of mankind. Hence, in every system of religion, the personal character and actions of its founder and his associates are more the objects of admiration and love of his followers, than the great principles, whether false or true, upon which it is founded. So in philosophy and science, we find the devotees of a sect or system cherishing with passionate admiration the memory of the great man who founded it, after they had strayed from or forgotten the truths, or abandoned the errors, which he promulgated.

Much more is this true in politics. For all his story shows that the rise or fall of parties depends more upon the personal qualities of the leaders, than upon the principles or measures they are formed to carry out. Men admire truth and virtue, but they love a good and virtuous man.

We despise falsehood and treachery, but we spurn and punish the liar and traitor. Principles appeal to judgment and reason alone. They make a lodgment in the mind as a part of our intellectual health, but except in rare instances, they never arouse to passionate and energetic action. Who does not know what in the late war, the northern heart, was more fired by love for the "old flag," the symbol of national glory and national unity, than any conviction of the importance of maintaining the Constitution, and enforcing the laws? And who does not know that on our side the personal qualities of our great leaders were even more potent to excite to heroic deeds, and not less heroic suffering, than even our cherished idea of national independence?

So then, I think it manifest, that we ought to have men as well as principles represented in the Convention. Our adversaries will have both, and there ought to exist some very powerful reasons to induce us to forego so obvious an advantage upon the mere point of exciting to enthusiasm and inciting to action on our side.

The ultimate end we aim at is not merely to defeat the ratification of the constitution at the polls, but to prevent the reconstruction of Mississippi under it. Our Alabama friends defeated the ratification of the constitution in their State, but because they permitted the Radicals to elect all the State and county officers, and thus have it organized fully in the interest of that party, it is very evident that the constitution (though rejected) will be accepted by Congress, and the officers thus elected inducted into office. The same fate will attend us, if we allow the Radicals to elect all the State and county officers. For if there be any thing which is incontrovertible, it is this, that the sole purpose of the Radicals, in inaugurating and carrying out reconstruction, is to make the ten Southern States radical and not democratic, their political friends and not their political adversaries. If we shall manage the canvass, as to make it appear that in this conviction the Radicals will be disappointed, they will seize the first decent pretext

to abandon reconstruction; and the defeat of the constitution furnishes not only a pretext for abandoning it, but what is better an honest, legal, and constitutional reason for it. In my judgment, we can prevent reconstruction under the present laws, only by defeating the constitution and also, by electing the officers or a majority of them. If any man shall say that the Radicals will not perpetrate the great outrage of admitting the State under a constitution which the people have affirmatively rejected, he is grossly ignorant of the *ambus* as well as of the necessities of the party. That they have no respect for our rights, interests or wishes, or for the Constitution of our common country, is abundantly manifest from every step they have taken to consummate our ruin and the Africanization of the South. The question to be debated, is not in my judgment, whether they would reconstruct the State if the Constitution were voted down, they having elected all the officers, but whether they would not reconstruct even if the Constitution were voted down, and the officers were all Democratic. For their necessities are such, that they might do this, inaugurating the defeated candidates, as well as the defeated Constitution. If they choose to do so, we cannot prevent it. But such action would be so manifest an outrage upon all American ideas of Constitutional liberty, and would be such a powerful weapon in the hands of their political opponents at the North, that they would possibly refrain from it; and if they did not it would but hasten the day, which must come ere long, when the Northern people themselves, for their own protection, will rise up and reverse what the Radicals have done. So then it seems clear, that in the event of our success in defeating the Constitution, that it would be better if we elected Democratic and Conservative officers.

I will now consider the question in reference to the *Constitution*, that the Constitution may be ratified. In that event it becomes of the greatest importance, that as many as possible of the State and county officers should be conservative, for how desirable will be our condition, if every State and county office shall be filled by the incompetent and corrupt men likely to be elected by the Radicals? Even a bad government may be tolerable, if we can have kind and honest administrators of law. The best form of government and the wisest system of laws would be intolerable, if the officers appointed to administer justice and execute the laws, were grossly ignorant or corrupt. In many counties, only that class of officers can be selected from the Radical party, as most, if not all, the virtue and intelligence of the community are arrayed against them. And here, let me add, that owing to the superior intelligence and virtue of the masses belonging to the Democratic party, that candidates taken from that party, would in most instances be so far superior to their antagonists, that they would poll a much larger vote than could be cast against the ratification of the Constitution. In the proposed new Constitution, I learn that all judges are to be appointed by the Governor with the advice of the Senate. How important, therefore, to have an honest and faithful Governor, and at least a majority of the Senate composed of good and faithful men! In many counties I have no doubt we can elect most, if not all the officers from the best class of the community. Shall we be devoted to the rule of the ignorant and vicious in those counties, when we can so easily avoid it? But again, if the whole political machinery of the State is to be voluntarily surrendered to the Radicals, how are we ever to reverse the present order of things, and regain our liberties? At every step we take in that direction, we are met and opposed by all the influence and power of the government. Our opponents now weak in all things except in numbers, will be strengthened in moral and political influence and importance, by being the recipients of the favors of the government, and the representatives of its authority. Besides this, the ambitious and unscrupulous on our side will gradually go over to our enemies, and thus swell their numbers, and increase their influence, and increase their power.

How then are we to dislodge them? It seems to me, that if we suffer our enemies to be thus strengthened by authority, it will be impossible ever to dislodge them, and that we and our children are to remain serfs and slaves for all time to come.

These views seem to me to be conclusively upon the question under consideration. I propose now to answer the objections which have been urged, and especially to answer that objection which I understand has most weight with you.

It is argued that if the Democratic Convention, should recommend to the party to vote for conservative incumbents for all the offices provided for in the new Constitution, we will raise up in our own party, a class composed of the candidates and their particular friends, who will be interested in the adoption of the Constitution, and that being so in fact, such is the infirmity of human nature, many of them will secretly favor its adoption, or at all

events, will cease active opposition to it.

This argument is not without weight, and ought not to be disregarded, except upon the gravest consideration, and the maturest reflection. But yet after a patient consideration of all that I have heard in its favor, I am satisfied that it is untenable.

For in the first place, it must be remembered that the election will be held for these officers, whether we will it or not; and that thus an opportunity will be afforded to every man, whether he be Democrat or Radical who desires it, to run for an office, and that the Convention has no power to prevent any one from availing himself of the opportunity thus offered.

This human infirmity which is based upon the argument I am answering, will be as powerful to seduce ambitious and selfish men to run for office in violation of the wishes of the party, as it will be to tempt men running as party candidates to defeat their party by secretly working against it, and to fold more so. For in most, if not all the counties, the Radical candidates will be so destitute of popular strength, that it will be evident to every man, that they could easily be defeated. Ambitious and selfish men will perceive and understand the situation, and judging rightly that their candidacy will be successful as against the Radical incumbents, they will be tempted to enter the canvass, and secure offices, which are so easily to be grasped. The action in one in this direction, will be the cause of like action in others. And in this way we will have a half dozen or more candidates for each county office taken from the Democratic ranks; but not responsible to, nor in affiliation with the party. The men so becoming candidates in opposition to a rule of policy adopted by their party, will soon cease to feel any obligation to respect its organization, and will lose all affection for its principles. They will, before the canvass is over, become either the avowed or secret enemies of rejection, and the allies of the Radicals.

If all men were pure and unselfish, this would not happen, nor would the argument I am answering have the slightest weight. If we nominate candidates for the State and county offices, we will at least have the chance of selecting men who would be superior to this temptation, and I know there are many such. Non-ambitious, where great interests are at stake, as now, and the public mind is deeply and profoundly moved, are usually acquired. Disappointed aspirants for nominations receive no encouragement to become candidates, and they therefore generally give their more fortunate competitors, a hearty support. A man who is selected as the standard bearer of a party, is less apt to betray it than one who is acting in open violation of its policy and principles. Pride, self respect, love and gratitude for his friends, who have promoted and trusted him, will, except where the nominee is utterly corrupt, keep him true to the cause which he represents.

But there is even a more safe protection against treachery than these. I propose to recommend to vote for the present incumbents, wherever they are true and faithful. We contest the whole proceedings for reconstruction, upon the idea, that they are unconstitutional and void; and that our present Constitution, will rightfully remain our Constitution, notwithstanding the ratification of the new one. By our present Constitution, the county officers hold their offices till the first day of January next, and until their successors are elected. In voting for them we solemnly declare our preference for our present constitution, and protest against the new one. We at the same time, endeavor to secure to the present incumbents what we regard as their legal and just rights. This is so obviously just, that no true Democrat can object to it, or thrust forward his personal aspirations for gratification in violation of the constitution and the principles of the party. These officers have already received the endorsement of the people at the polls, when the elective franchise was confined to, and can trace all the white race. In nearly every instance therefore, they are representative men; and entitled to, and possess the confidence of the people. But if, as is likely, there be some who, false to the constitution and the people who elected them, have allied themselves with the Radical party, and thereby affirming that their present term of office ought to, and does legally, expire at the election; it will be no abandonment of principle on our part, to take them at their word, and to relieve them of a trust which they have not only abused, but propose voluntarily to abandon. In such cases, I would advise, that our friends make suitable nominations of new men, good and true and loyal to the Constitution and liberties of the people. I approve nominations in all cases, to prevent discord and contention, and to secure fidelity on the part of the candidate.

These considerations also apply to the State officers. It is true that the terms have expired, except the Attorney General, but the Constitution provides that they shall hold over until their successors are elected. We deny that any person elected at the ensuing election, will be constitutionally elected, and therefore we affirm that they are no legal successors of the State officers. In voting for the State officers, we but solemnly affirm the truth of this position.

This brings me to a suggestion made by a member of the committee, in whose judgment I have great confidence, viz: that we ought to try to run candidates who could take the test oath prescribed in the new constitution, so that if the constitution should be carried, the officers elected could be inducted into office. But this suggestion, whilst it is utterly impracticable, runs counter also to the principles of the party, in acknowledging to some extent the validity of the election. This acknowledgment would weaken the conviction of the people in the unconstitutionality of the whole proceeding. We ought to do nothing that would have this effect. There is a large majority against us, and we can only succeed, if success be attainable at all, by that earnest and energetic work, which results from earnest and undoubting convictions that we are right. But it may be asked, what good will result to us, if we elect officers who cannot take the test oath? I answer this. We get the benefit of the principle involved, by voting for the present officers. We get the benefit of having good and true men for our standard bearers. If the Constitution is defeated they still remain in office, until removed by the military power. If the Constitution be ratified, and the State admitted under it, then we have honest and faithful judges, they will allow the decision of the Supreme Court of the United States, and of the Supreme Court of Mississippi (composed of Radical judges) and decide the test oath to be unconstitutional. For it is fundamental, but if we are admitted as a State in the Union, there is no power, which can determine whether an incumbent of an office be entitled to it, save alone the State authority itself. But if this should not happen, then the office will be vacant, and it will be time enough then in a special election, to seek for candidates, who are qualified to take office under the constitution which has been imposed on us. The great question before us is, how to defeat reconstruction, and we ought, in the means we shall adopt, to look rather to their efficiency in securing success, than to their convenience in case of defeat.

A word in reference to members of the Legislature and members of Congress.

I would suggest, in reference to them, that there be selected good and true men, without reference to their qualifications to take their seats. They will be accepted least in the canvass, and on their action much depends for our success. We should look rather to keeping bad men out of those positions than to putting good men in. It ought to be enjoined upon these candidates to make an active canvass, and no man should be selected who, from any cause, will not be an active and energetic canvasser.

I have thus hastily sketched for the consideration of yourself and such members of the committee as you may see proper to show this letter to, my views in relation to the questions herein discussed. I regard this running of candidates as of the last importance. I do not feel that confidence in success which would allow me to disregard any honorable means which would appear expedient to attain it. On the contrary, I regard the result as doubtful, and I am satisfied that success can be attained only by the most prudent measures, and the most energetic action. Every man must surrender his aspirations for promotion, and work for the common good. No personal success can compensate any good man for the loss of our liberties, necessarily resulting from the adoption of the constitution.

Just here it occurs to me that I ought to add another suggestion, that let the election in this State result as it may, it amounts to nothing, except so far as it may influence the Presidential election. If the Radicals elect the President, then we are doomed to reconstruction under African rule—if the Democrats succeed, we shall be restored to our just constitutional rights.

We ought therefore to conduct the canvass in such manner as will most help our friends at the North. Surely a defeat of the constitution, and the election of Democratic officers, will greatly encourage and inspire them and greatly embarrass our enemies. Earnest and active work on our part will inspire Conservatives of the North to battle more earnestly and vigorously for the right.

Very truly, J. Z. GEORGE.

To Hon. Foster Anderson, Jackson, Miss.

Why do birds in their little nests agree? I Because they'd fall out if they didn't.

In slavery times, says Beecher, "the crust between the South and hell was not an inch thick." The crust has been broken by Northern Radicals, and they and the negroes are all gone down together.

Business is business. The following anecdotes are told of the late W. M. Swain, formerly proprietor of the Philadelphia Ledger:

As a business man he was very rigid in his adherence to what he considered to be sound business principles. "Never fix a price on another man's goods," was one of these principles. A paper dealer met him one day in the street.

"Mr. Swain," said he, "I have some excellent white paper of the size of the Ledger. Do you wish to buy?" "Yes," was the reply.

"What are you willing to give for it?" was the next inquiry.

"Precisely the worth of it, sir, neither more nor less," was the rejoinder.

"Oh, of course. But I mean, Mr. Swain, what can you afford to give me for it?"

"Double price if I choose; but I don't."

"But, fix the price, sir."

"I never put a price on another man's goods. If you don't know the value of your own paper you should not dispose of it. If you do, you are wasting my time and your own in idle circumlocutions to get the advantage of me. Tell me your price, if it suits, well; if not you may find some other customer."

Business is business, and nothing should interfere with it, was another of his business principles. Consequently he would take nothing on the price of an advertisement on the score of friendship or benevolence, or any other of the ten thousand petty excuses made to stamp the printer.

A gentleman once called upon him with an advertisement of a benefit for a poor widow with several hopeless children. "How much for the advertisement, under the circumstances?"

"And he," "Just what it costs," said Mr. Swain. "Business is business, charity is another question."

But a poor widow, sir! every dollar saved is a matter of serious moment to her family."

"Business is business," I repeat, sir. What I choose to give to charity is my own private affair. My business has nothing to do with it."

"Then you will take no less?"

"Not a cent, sir." The gentleman and the bill reluctantly, amounting to, perhaps, two dollars, and was going out of the office, red eared with anger, and severely in his own mind upon the parsimony of Mr. Swain, when the latter stopped him. "Do you know this widow?"

"She is, sir."

"She is, sir," Mr. Swain slipped a gold ball in the gentleman's hand, and turning on his heel, walked away saying, "Business is business."

A CUNNING CUNNING.—The husband of an old lady in Buckinghamshire died without making his will, in the want of which very necessary precaution, his estate would have passed away from his widow, had she not resorted to the following expedient to avert the loss of the property. She concealed the death of her husband, and procured upon an old ebbing, her neighbor, and who was in person somewhat like the deceased, to go to bed, at her house and personate him, in which character it was agreed that he should dictate a will, leaving the widow the estate.

An attorney was sent for to draw up the will; and the widow, in great affliction at her good man's death, began to weep and to utter pious ejaculations to the effect, "The old lady groaned aloud, fully answered, and refused to leave you half my estate, and I think the poor old shoemaker, who lives opposite to us, is deserving of the other half, for he has always been a good neighbor."

The widow was thunderstruck at receiving a reply so different from that which she expected, but dared not neglect the cunning's will for fear of losing the whole of the property, whilst he laughed in his sleeve, and divided with her the fruits of a project intended for her sole benefit.

When Jackson was moving on to strike McClellan's flank on the Chickasaw, he came to a stream which had no bridge, and could not be crossed without one. The General had brought with him from the Valley a rough, uneducated negro, full of energy, who had served him in emergencies, and in whom he had the utmost confidence. He called this man and told him that the stream must be bridged immediately; the regular engineers were also advised of the fact. In a short time the rough carpenter and the polished men of science were at the stream; the former had his plan, the latter had his tools; he wished to go at the work at once without drawings, but they objected until they could perfect the plans on paper. The engineers retired to their tent to perfect a paper bridge; the carpenter took his men and went to work to make a real one. In a very short time he completed it. The General's tent, and reported briefly thus: "General, that bridge is done, but the pictures ain't done yet!"—Exchange.

A dispatch from Cork States that a Maryland has been sentenced to twelve years hard labor.

One editor heads marriages "nose items," and another "feats of the tongue."

The lady who was driven out of her mind has since recovered a little, and given the name to her house.

Gen. Grant spends a couple of hours every day with Mr. Stanton, who still remains entrenched in the War Department.

The Louisville Courier has a Washington dispatch which says, Gov. Jenkins, of Georgia, is here, and says Georgians are organizing for the constitution election, and will vote it down. He says the late of Alabama, sacrificed by the treachery of Congress, has hurried them to their work.

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